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Tuesday, 30 January 2018, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/60)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/60)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/60, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017).

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to provide the Security Council with an update on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Years of conflict have caused immeasurable human suffering and left countless civilians dead, injured or missing. The United Nations estimates that 13.1 million people are in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, including 6.1 million people who are displaced within the country. Another 5.5 million people have fled the conflict across borders into neighbouring countries. The Council will have heard at first hand the account of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in his statement to the Security Council on 22 January with regard to his visit to Syria, in which he highlighted the plight of the Syrian people. During the visit, he heard individual stories from some of the people caught up in the violence and conflict. In Homs, he saw entire districts of the city reduced to rubble. The visit was the first for an Emergency Relief Coordinator in more than two years. It was an important opportunity to see ways in which the United Nations can support people in need. It was also a chance to hold discussions with the Government of Syria and our humanitarian partners on how to address some of the most pressing humanitarian needs.

As fighting continues, I am particularly concerned about the safety and protection of civilians caught up in the violence in north-west Syria, where hostilities have reportedly caused numerous deaths and injuries. Air strikes and fighting in southern Idlib and northern Hama have resulted in more than 270,000 displacements since 15 December 2017, driving people from their homes to other areas of Idlib. Camps for displaced people are overstretched, forcing most of those displaced to seek shelter in some 160 makeshift settlements. During the cold and wet winter months, many families have nothing else but improvised tents, which they share with others.

Attacks on medical facilities and vital infrastructure continue, with reports of at least 16 attacks on health-care facilities during the month of December alone. Yesterday Médecins Sans Frontières reported that air strikes had hit a hospital it supports in the Saraqib district of Idlib, causing five deaths, injuring others and seriously damaging the facility, which is now closed. That was the second reported strike on the facility in nine days.

Further north, in Afrin, in Aleppo governorate, the United Nations is carefully monitoring the situation of over 300,000 people living in the district, which is experiencing fighting. We have reports of civilian casualties and that approximately 15,000 people have been displaced within the district, with another 1,000 displaced to Aleppo governorate. We have also received reports that local authorities inside Afrin are restricting civilian movement, particularly for those who want to leave.

I am also concerned about the situation in eastern Ghouta and areas of Damascus, where civilian deaths and destruction of civilian infrastructure continue to be reported. In the first 10 days of the year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented at least 81 civilians killed in the enclave, including 25 women and 30 children. Scores of residential buildings in the area have been damaged or destroyed in recent weeks. I also note with concern that shelling continues from eastern Ghouta into Damascus, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries.

Although 29 patients in urgent need of medical care were allowed out of eastern Ghouta in late December, hundreds more, most of them women and children, require immediate medical attention. So far, there have

been 21 civilian deaths among those waiting for and needing medical evacuation. Their needs are critical, and the law is clear. I urge all parties, and all those with influence over the parties, to see to it that all such medical evacuations take place without conditions or delay.

With reference to all of the flashpoints I have highlighted, I call on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian and medical infrastructure, in line with international humanitarian law, and to ensure the safe, sustained and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to all in need.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate my concern about the protection situation in the city of Raqqa, where returns continue despite the widespread presence of explosive remnants of war. Nearly 60,000 individuals have reportedly returned since the end of hostilities in October 2017. However, humanitarian partners continue to emphasize that, given the high prevalence of landmines, booby traps and unexploded ordinance, Raqqa is not safe for civilian returns.

Deaths and injuries due to explosions have been reported with alarming frequency, and trauma cases nearly doubled in recent months. More than 534 civilians have been injured in blasts since the expulsion of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant from the city in October 2017, of whom 112 people died. Each week, between 30 and 50 civilians continue to arrive at trauma centres in Raqqa after being wounded by improvised explosive devices concealed in their homes and neighbourhoods. Risk from explosive hazards is not limited to Raqqa; there are indications that substantial contamination also exists throughout Deir ez-Zor governorate, where there has been little or no mine surveying or clearance.

Despite the desperate humanitarian needs in many areas in Syria, the United Nations and humanitarian partners continue to face serious challenges in accessing those in need. Last month, I briefed the Council that none of our cross-line convoys were able to reach besieged locations and that only two convoys had accessed hard-to-reach areas. This month, the United Nations and its partners have had no access to any such locations at all. Not one convoy has been able to deploy. Discussions about convoys have stalled over requirements to lower the number of beneficiaries and about splitting convoys in a way that would not allow us to provide food or other essential items. Our deliveries must continue to be based on humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, impartially based on civilian need.

At the same time, the United Nations is also seeing access to areas previously reached under regular programming coming to a halt. Local authorities in north-east Syria have twice held humanitarian convoys at the checkpoint with Government-controlled areas in eastern Aleppo. Furthermore, local authorities have requested changes related to the operations of our non-governmental partners, which in turn has blocked our assistance delivery to much of north-east Syria. The situation has been further compounded by the refusal of the Governor of Hassakah to issue facilitation letters for our deliveries. While the cross-border operations of our partners continue, such assistance is not sufficient to meet the needs in the north-east. To solve the situation, I call on all parties and those with influence over them to engage now to see that access to those areas resume.

Finally, due to insecurity in the north-west, which has included numerous rocket attacks from within Syria into Turkey, on 20 January the United Nations temporarily suspended cross-border deliveries at the two authorized border crossing points in Turkey. The United Nations remains in discussion with Turkish authorities on restarting operations as quickly as possible to ensure the continued delivery of assistance, which hundreds of thousands of Syrians rely upon every month.

Those access challenges underscore the importance of using all the modalities of delivery at our disposal. Despite prevailing challenges, the United Nations and its partners have continued to reach millions of people in need each month. For example, in December, regular programming from within the country resulted in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of people, including over 3 million people who received food assistance through 1,500 deliveries. The United Nations and its partners also provided health, protection and education services. Cross-border assistance also continued to reach hundreds of thousands of people in need, as 653 trucks delivered food assistance to more than 500,000 people, health assistance for over 600,000 treatments, as well as other support for hundreds of thousands.

After almost eight years of conflict, people's needs are as vast as they are critical. The United Nations and its partners will continue to deliver to millions of

people in need. The United Nations also stands ready to bolster such support, but requires efficient and effective mechanisms to ensure the safe and rapid delivery of aid. To that end, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has identified five areas where the United Nations is looking to make concrete progress.

First, we need to finalize the United Nations humanitarian response plan for 2018, for which we will be seeking $3.5 billion to meet the needs of more than 13 million people in all parts of Syria.

Secondly, it is important that there be an agreement on medical evacuations for hundreds of critically ill people trapped in besieged eastern Ghouta. People in other besieged areas should get the same assistance.

Thirdly, humanitarian access needs to improve. The United Nations has requested agreement for three to four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent inter-agency cross-line convoys each week. We need consistent access to all people in need.

Fourthly, we must reach agreement on the United Nations-supported aid convoys from Damascus to Rukban in south-eastern Syria. While the exceptional delivery of assistance from Jordan in early January was a positive development, a sustainable solution is required.

Fifthly, more effective arrangements are needed to enable the United Nations to support the work of Syrian non-governmental organizations and to enable international non-governmental organizations to perform the stronger role they can, and are ready to, play in relieving the suffering.

I hope that we will be able to report to the Security Council next month on real progress achieved in those five key areas, and that, month after month, we will move forward until they are all fully addressed.

The President: I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing.

When considering the Syria humanitarian issue, we always have in mind the powerful plea last December by the Russian Permanent Representative that we should keep our differences over the politics in Syria out of our consideration of humanitarian issues — a view that we strongly continue to endorse.

Last week, Mark Lowcock briefed us on his visit to Syria. It was the first time that an Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had visited Syria in more than two years, having been blocked previously from visiting. The United Kingdom commends the Under-Secretary-General's efforts to start a meaningful dialogue between the United Nations and the Syrian regime in order to improve the humanitarian situation for the people of Syria. On the basis of discussions and as we iterated today, the Under-Secretary-General set out five clear asks to enable the United Nations to sustain and improve its aid efforts. The United Kingdom fully supports those asks. Unfortunately, the Security Council has been unable to reach agreement on a text that would unanimously call upon the Syrian regime to ensure that those five asks are granted without delay. I want to reflect on this disappointing situation.

One of the five key asks of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is the regime's agreement to allow three or four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines to provide assistance to up to 2.5 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These convoys are needed to deliver aid, including both food and medical supplies, to civilians who have lived in a war zone for almost seven years. That request for consistent, regular access to all people in need is crucial. In 2017, only 27 per cent of United Nations inter-agency convoy requests were approved by the Syrian regime in full. That is significantly worse than in 2016, when 45 per cent of requests were approved. Assistant Secretary-General Mueller's briefing was especially concerning in that respect. We cannot let that happen again in 2018.

Ninety-four per cent of those living under siege are located in eastern Ghouta. The Al-Assad regime is using humanitarian aid as a weapon of war by restricting access to the besieged population. There were no aid deliveries to the area for the whole of December, and nearly 12 per cent of children under five years of age in eastern Ghouta suffer from acute malnutrition. It is appalling that innocent children are once again suffering the most. The Under-Secretary-General also requested the immediate evacuation of hundreds of people who are in need of medical assistance from eastern Ghouta. We call on those who can influence the regime to use all of their authority to allow for rapid, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations

for those in need. According to the Secretary-General, 18 people have already died while waiting for the regime's permission to leave the besieged city. People are dying for want of health care and services that are available fewer than 10 miles away, in Damascus.

Let us recall that the backdrop of the Under-Secretary-General's visit was the escalation in air strikes in eastern Ghouta and the north-west, including Aleppo, Idlib governorate and northern Hama. Yesterday at least five people, including a child, were killed by an air strike on a hospital supported by Médecins sans frontières in Syria's Idlib governorate. The facility was also seriously damaged and at least six people, including three medical staff, were injured as a result of the attack. The air strikes on the hospital occurred while the doctors were receiving people who had been injured an hour earlier in another air strike on a market. Those strikes had already killed 11 people.

These events are taking place are in areas where there are meant to be ceasefires with the stated aim of putting a prompt end to violence and improving the humanitarian situation. Unfortunately for the people of Syria, that could not be further from the reality. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in Idlib and eastern Ghouta continues, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The intensification of hostilities has displaced approximately 270,000 people within Idlib since 15 December 2017, stretching scarce resources beyond their limits. The escalation of air strikes in eastern Ghouta has resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths since 30 December. UNICEF reports that, in the first 14 days of 2018, more than 30 children were killed by escalating violence in the enclave.

It is against that backdrop that I call on the regime to allow for immediate, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance to meet fully the needs of those who require food and medical supplies. Let all with influence exert it to ensure that. It is our must crucial, immediate request. It is also imperative that all parties adhere to agreed ceasefires and cessations of hostilities, uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

Yesterday, a number of us visited the United States National Holocaust Museum's exhibition on Syria. We saw the photographs of those killed and tortured by the regime and we read their biographies, their life stories. It had a profound effect on me, and it brought home how the tragedy in Syria is not just a geopolitical one — it is a human one. For humanity's sake, all of us around this table must ensure that we have done our all.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her comprehensive briefing. I reiterate France's full support for the recommendations of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, which Ms. Mueller has just referenced.

I would also like to express my country's grave concerns about the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Several points are of particular concern. We note the extremely dire situation of the population in eastern Ghouta — still besieged and denied the humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations that they need — and the escalation of violence, particularly in the Idlib region. In addition, we are concerned about the attacks on hospitals, medical facilities and the provision of health care, as well as the persistent restrictions on humanitarian access in Syria, which are unacceptable and have tightened further in recent weeks — denying the civilian population the access to the essential resources that they so vitally need. Accordingly, I should like to make three main observations.

First, we are particularly concerned about the current escalation of violence in eastern Ghouta and the Idlib region, which adds to the suffering of the affected populations. In eastern Ghouta, 400,000 civilians are victims of almost daily bombings by the regime and its allies. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 750 people in eastern Ghouta are still waiting for emergency medical evacuation. Since 30 December, the wounded have been unable to be transported out of eastern Ghouta to receive care; 21 others have died from their wounds, unable to wait another day. We note and stress that it is the responsibility of the Syrian regime to allow those medical evacuations to proceed without delay.

The situation in the south of Idlib and in the north of Hama is very worrying as well. The continued bombings led to the displacement of about 250,000 civilians last month. More than 33 people were reportedly killed in less than 24 hours. The town of Sarakab was bombed yesterday morning, and the strikes hit the town market, killing more than 11 people and injuring a number of others. One hour later, the only public hospital in the district — a hospital supported by the non-governmental

organization Médecins Sans Frontières — was struck, killing five people, including a child, and injuring six others, including medical staff.

France very firmly condemns attacks on health-care workers and medical infrastructure, as well as the indiscriminate bombings carried out in recent weeks by the Syrian regime against civilians in eastern Ghouta and in residential areas of Idlib province.

France reiterates that indiscriminate bombings and the use of incendiary weapons against civilians represent serious violations of international humanitarian law and could constitute war crimes or even crimes against humanity. It is vital and urgent to bring to an immediate end the bombings in Idlib and the siege in eastern Ghouta. The Astana guarantors have taken upon themselves the responsibility to supervise its implementation, and we therefore urge these States to effectively impose on the Syrian regime a complete cessation of hostilities as well as respect for the basic principles and norms of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The second observation is particularly worrying: the deterioration of humanitarian access in recent weeks in Syria. We have reiterated this concern on numerous occasions in this Chamber: the humanitarian situation will not improve without comprehensive, unimpeded, safe and ongoing humanitarian access to the aid distributed by the United Nations and its partners.

Nonetheless, the regime is continuing to create unacceptable obstacles to the provision of humanitarian aid. The Syrian authorities have not authorized even a single inter-agency convoy in several weeks. France condemns this unacceptable attitude and reiterates its call for the safe and unhindered access of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to civilians throughout Syrian territory. The right of the Syrian population both to humanitarian assistance and to protection must be respected unconditionally.

The Security Council cannot remain silent given these recurring violations of international humanitarian law, which require a strong response from the Council.

Finally, I would like to touch on the obvious discrepancy between the continuing violence on the ground in Syria and the diplomatic offensives, which are not facing up to the situation. We know that only an inclusive political solution that is elaborated under the auspices of the United Nations and that sets up a political transition in the context of resolution 2254 (2015) can bring a lasting and credible end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

However, the regime is continuing its policy of methodical and deliberate obstruction, as we saw during the negotiation session held in Vienna on 25 and 26 January. In this context more than ever, we need to support the United Nations and United Nations mediation in Geneva, as well as eschew any temporary solutions agreed without the opposition, which would be unrealistic as they would not meet the aspirations of all Syrians. It is up to those countries that support the regime, primarily Russia and Iran, to bring to bear the pressure necessary to ensure that the regime puts an end to this negative and irresponsible strategy. Make no mistake: there can be no negotiated political transition in Syria without a total ceasefire, humanitarian access throughout the whole of the territory and the creation of a neutral environment that would restore trust and ensure the safety of all Syrians.

How credible is a regime that is stepping up the bombing in Idlib, preventing medical evacuations in eastern Ghouta and refusing to authorize a single humanitarian convoy? How credible can diplomatic efforts be that are devoid of any specific assurances and that do not lead to any significant and lasting improvement in the humanitarian situation in Idlib and eastern Ghouta?

We reiterate that humanitarian aid is unconditional and apolitical. We therefore make an urgent request to see proof of this on the ground. That is exactly what France will seek to defend in the weeks to come, in line with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), namely, the establishment of a neutral environment that must include the lifting of sieges, the cessation of hostilities, prisoner exchanges and chemical disarmament, all of this under international supervision so as to ensure genuine constitutional reform and the holding of free elections. That is the only way to bring a lasting end to the suffering of the Syrian people and open the way to an inclusive political process in Syria, in the interests of all the Syrian people. It is for that reason that we will continue to fully support the process stemming from resolution 2254 (2015), and we will make every effort to unite the Council in this respect.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands wishes to thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her briefing.

Seven years after the start of the conflict in Syria, the humanitarian situation in the country continues to be a truly heartbreaking drama. While several parties to the conflict are responsible for a wide array of violations of international humanitarian law, it is especially painful to see the horrifying effects of the military actions taken by the Syrian authorities.

Instead of protecting their own citizens, the Syrian authorities are bombing them. Instead of providing basic services to their people, the authorities are destroying hospitals and schools. Instead of allowing humanitarian aid into the most affected areas, the authorities are starving some of their own people.

The outlook for 2018 remains grim, with a worsening humanitarian situation and a continuation of the battle for influence by regional Powers. Allow me to focus on three important aspects: the current situation on the ground, cross-border aid delivery and the implementation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) five asks.

On the situation on the ground, the international community has been providing funding for a principled humanitarian response. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has provided amply to the United Nations and to international non-governmental organizations in order to provide relief for the suffering of the Syrian people. But this relief is hardly reaching those in need.

In besieged eastern Ghouta, we are witnessing the use of starvation as a method of warfare. Not a single aid convoy has reached the 400,000 people trapped there in the last three months. Where have we seen this before? In Idlib, because of the continuous intensified aerial bombardments, aid to more than 250,000 internally displaced persons is extremely difficult to deliver.

Improvised explosive devices in Raqqa and elsewhere in Syria have caused large numbers of casualties. The Netherlands urges all Council members to continue their contributions to make all of Syria free of mines and explosive devices.

Concerning cross-border aid delivery, it is equally disturbing that today, one month after the Council renewed the authorization of cross-border aid, some of these very aid convoys cannot cross the border because of the security situation. The consequences of this lack of cross-border aid for the large number of displaced people in north-west Syria are tremendous. There is an urgent need to ensure that all convoys can have safe passage to reach those in need, both in Afrin and beyond.

In Afrin, the intensification of the military operation there last Sunday has led to more displaced families that have nowhere to go. We call upon all parties to protect civilians, to facilitate humanitarian access and to allow for the safe passage of all people who wish to leave areas under attack.

Turning to the implementation of OCHA's five asks, the recent visit by Mark Lowcock to Syria was in itself a positive step, but it is imperative that the dialogue on aid delivery yield effective results as soon as possible. In effect, the requests made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator do not differ much from those of his predecessors, effectively highlighting the lack of progress in terms of sustained, principled humanitarian access to those most in need.

The message of the humanitarian and international community has been consistent: respect your obligations under international humanitarian law, protect your own citizens — including health workers and humanitarian aid workers — and allow for rapid, safe and sustained humanitarian access.

In conclusion, it is crucial that the Security Council unequivocally unite itself behind the concrete and attainable five asks of OCHA. It remains essential to see progress on the rapid, effective and principled implementation in the coming weeks of all five asks of OCHA. We call on Council members to consider steps to be taken collectively in case no progress takes place and on those who have influence on the Syrian authorities to make sure that humanitarian aid reaches those most in need. Let us not forget that lives are at stake.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): The Security Council met only last week (see S/PV.8164) and heard the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs describe his visit to Syria and reiterate a series of requests that, in his estimation, would be a positive step towards improving the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Sadly, not only has none of those requests been approved by the Syrian regime, but also the situation in places such as eastern Ghouta continues to deteriorate beyond our worst imagination. To the surprise of no one, cross-line deliveries in Syria, particularly to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, remain stalled. In

fact, there have been no United Nations inter-agency convoys anywhere for more than six weeks and no convoys to a besieged area for more than eight weeks.

We deplore what are, frankly, starve-and-siege tactics, preventing the distribution of aid, which must be needs-based. As a result, many families are going without the most basic food, medicine and other supplies required for survival. Hospitals reuse syringes and other medical items meant for single use and, during the coldest months of winter, families who have run out of fuel and cooking oil burn household items to stay warm. That is happening in Ghouta and elsewhere throughout Syria.

We need an immediate, unconditional humanitarian pause in eastern Ghouta, where the impact of air strikes and artillery shelling on the civilian infrastruture has forced the closure of more schools and medical clinics. Those bombings continued over the weekend, further proving that any supposed ceasefire in the area was merely aspirational.

We reiterate the need to evacuate hundreds of critically ill people trapped in eastern Ghouta. We have seen no movement on that issue since late December, and the list continues to grow. Only a few weeks ago, we heard that the medical evacuation list contained 600 names, including hundreds of children. That list has now grown to at least 750 people, according to the United Nations staff on the ground.

Over the weekend, the United Nations reported that another critically ill person on Ghouta's medical evacuation list died due to the lack of medical treatment. Such deaths are senseless and reflect the Syrian regime's depraved disregard for human life. Such gratuitous cruelty suggests that the regime's siege of eastern Ghouta is directed not at the armed opposition but against the civilian population. We need not remind the members of the Council that a siege directed against civilians is a violation of international humanitarian law.

We also appreciate the fact that Sweden and Kuwait worked on a draft presidential statement to address such dire humanitarian challenges. The overwhelming majority of Council members agree that we must be clear in demanding that the Syrian authorities allow immediate medical evacuations and cross-line assistance. When there are hundreds of thousands of Syrians besieged by the regime and starving due to the regime's actions, such demands are the very least that the Council can make.

We would also like to take a moment to thank the Government of Jordan for facilitating an extraordinary delivery of humanitarian assistance in mid-January to the internally displaced populations stranded at Rukban. That population now has food and relief items for one month. However, we continue to wait for the Syrian regime's formal approval for the United Nations to begin cross-line aid deliveries to that vulnerable population from Damascus. The United Nations submitted its proposal in mid-November and has still receievd no response. All arrangements have been made for the deliveries to begin as soon as possible. The Syrian regime has only to grant its approval and to stand out of the way for life-saving assistance to reach those in need.

As we heard earlier today, members of the Security Council visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., yesterday and saw the exhibition about the Syrian regime's arbitrary detention and torture of more than 100,000 civilians. The name of the exhibition is "Please Don't Forget Us". We should bear that, and what the Syrian regime is capable of doing, in mind as we discuss yet again what is taking place in easter Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her briefing.

Bolivia regrets the crisis in Syria, which, after all these years, has caused so much destruction and the loss of so many lives. Ms. Mueller told us that, since the beginning of the conflict, more than 500,000 people have died; currently, there are 13.1 million people who need humanitarian assistance, 2.9 million of whom are trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; and at least 6.1 million people have been internally displaced.

We believe that the most recent events have resulted in an increase in the number of dead, of people who need humanitarian assistance and of internally displaced persons. We call for the cleaning and demining of and access for basic humanitarian assistance to the city of Raqqa to take place as soon as possible to allow for the safe and dignified return of those families who were displaced due to the conflict. We regret that, since the month of October 2017, approximately 220 people have died and others have been injured in blasts.

The recent events in Syria show once again the urgent need to revitalize the Geneva political process, reinforcing the tangible results of the Astana meeting, in consultation, of course, with all the parties involved, including the opposition, in order to facilitate the development of mutual confidence-building measures and, as a result, the improvement of the political and humanitarian situation. We are certain that this will also allow for the release of detainees and hostages and the search for the disappeared, as well as for the establishment of conditions for a political process and a sustained and lasting ceasefire.

We express our support for the efforts made recently in Vienna and for the work to take place in Sochi. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to allow his representative to participate in those events.

We once again remind the parties to the conflict that they must allow unconditional access for humanitarian assistance, ensuring and safeguarding the security and physical integrity of humanitarian workers, in particular in the besieged and hard-to-reach areas. In that regard, we reiterate once again our highest recognition for the work being done by the staff of the various humanitarian assistance agencies and bodies on the ground, and we urge the parties involved to meet their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We remind the parties involved that they must implement the Astana agreements, respect the de-escalation areas and prevent any attacks on civilian institutions, such as residential areas, schools and hospitals, in line with international humanitarian law, to ensure the protection of civilians and unimpeded access for accredited humanitarian organizations to provide the greatly needed assistance. In that regard, we underscore the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has reached 800,000 people through cross-border convoys. We hope that those operations can continue, for which better coordination and cooperation between the United Nations and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic are recommended.

In that context, we underscore the agreements arrived at among Iran, Russia, and Turkey on 22 December 2017, and we urgently call for strengthening them so as to free detainees and abductees, as well as to positively identify missing persons. We stress the importance of the work of the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has become a guarantor of security and the distribution of humanitarian aid, while ensuring the evacuation of persons from areas facing armed conflict.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the humanitarian situation, which is affecting more than 13.2 million people in Syria, must be resolved exclusively through an organized, inclusive and political process based on dialogue and led for and by the Syrian people, which would allow for a peaceful solution respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria. We call on members of the Security Council to make every effort to ensure that it remain unified on such an issue as fundamental as humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for her detailed briefing.

The humanitarian landscape in Syria that she described to us this morning is, once again, disheartening. Over the past several years, the relevant reports of the Secretary-General and Security Council meetings on this issue have repeatedly related victim fatalities, the renewal of the large-scale displacement of refugees, besieged cities, an increasing spread of diseases, a high level of malnutrition, the destruction of medical infrastructure and other scourges. Given such a situation, the only remedy left is to ensure the immediate, safe and unrestricted access of humanitarian assistance and strict compliance under international humanitarian law, in particular respect for the principle of proportionality as related to conducting military attacks and taking the appropriate precautions with regard to their impact on the civilian population.

We therefore regret the persistent restrictions placed on access to humanitarian aid in various areas of Syria, in particular the tragic and untenable situation facing the people of eastern Ghouta and Idlib. We hope that the ceasefire agreement in eastern Ghouta, recently deliberated in Vienna, will have a positive secondary effect in addressing the pressing humanitarian needs of its people. We appreciate the work of the Syrian authorities and Russia that resulted in the medical evacuation of 29 people from eastern Ghouta in December 2017. At the same time, we encourage them

to intensify such efforts as there are hundreds of other people who are in need of urgent care.

Another issue that deeply concerns us pertains to demining and, in general, to the deactivation of explosive ordnance, in the light of what is happening daily in cities, such as Raqqa in which 30 to 50 victims, who fall prey to such ordnance, are recorded weekly. We see as positive the dialogue aimed at humanitarian goals between the United Nations and the Government of Syria, especially the visit to the country by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock. That dialogue and the joint statement on humanitarian mine action issued following the latest Astana meeting positively herald that more substantial progress could be made in that area. Concerning military operations in densely populated areas, such as Afrin, we call for preventing any escalation that could further exacerbate the suffering of the people and hinder achieving a political solution pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

It is absolutely necessary that the Council show the world its unity and sense of commitment, and send a message that prioritizes human beings over political interests. We therefore hope that a consensus can be reached on the adoption of a text that reflects the five priorities outlined by Mr. Lowcock, which constitute the bare minimum for alleviating the human suffering of the Syrian people, and that is why Peru fully supports them.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): In taking the floor at this meeting on the humanitarian situation of Syrian Arab Republic, I should like to begin by sincerely thanking Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for her detailed briefing on the very unfortunate humanitarian situation that Syria is currently undergoing. Moreover, we listened to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing on 22 January following his visit to Syria, in which he pointed out for us five areas where improvement is needed in order to address the serious humanitarian situation, including the imperative to address the needs of some 13 million people in Syria, to facilitate medical evacuations and freedom of movement across borders, and to adopt measures so that the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations can provide effective assistance to the Syrian people.

Both Ms. Mueller and Mr. Lowcock's briefings afford us a very desolate overview that must focus the attention of the international community on making every effort necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The specific situation in eastern Ghouta, in which almost 94 per cent of the people are trapped, is a particularly a worrisome issue. The situation of more than 600 people in need of urgent medical care has been, and is being, exacerbated by air-strike campaigns that have led to the displacement of those in Idlib and Hama.

In addition to all this, we also point to the catastrophic humanitarian situation resulting from the ongoingOperation Olive Branch, which is leading to the substantial displacement and suffering of civilians. On the one hand, that can only elicit our deep concern, and, on the other hand, we must call for redoubling the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to find a solution to the very serious humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President: There are no more speakers inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.